

SPEAK UP

The next generation of citizen soldiers and active-duty military personnel is being trained in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps programs all over the state of Mississippi. From their ranks will come some of the people we will look to the next time the security of the United States is threatened. And, they will leave their jobs and their homes, and serve. Here's what students at Meridian High School say about being involved in JROTC.

"JROTC opened a door for me and showed me that people want to help me and were not out to hurt me. It taught me to be motivated in everything that I do. It gave me the courage to overcome a lot of new obstacles. I even joined the exhibition drill team. When I joined JROTC, I began to do better in my work. I improved academically and with my attitude. I began to have a higher respect for authority."



Carlisle

Scelcia Carlisle, junior
Career goal: Active-duty Navy

"Every week, students in our high school who are involved in JROTC wear their uniforms to school to show pride and commitment to our nation. I take pride in wearing my uniform and what it represents. It brings pride to people all over the world and helps remind us of those who have fought for our freedom, and those who are fighting against terrorism all over the world — especially in Iraq."

Franchesca Johnson, junior
Career goal: Undecided



Johnson

"I am proud that I joined the JROTC program because of all that it has taught me in the areas of leadership, discipline and becoming a better citizen."

"The most significant reason why I am in JROTC is the uniform. At my high school, we wear the Army uniform the same way actual military officers wear theirs."

"Wearing my uniform is very important to me for several reasons. The first reason is the simple fact that I seem to gain more respect from others while wearing it. The next is because the uniform I wear is the same as the one Pvt. Jessica Lynch wore until she was held as prisoner of war. This makes me proud to wear it because it honors what people are doing overseas in the war in Iraq."

Alesha Horne, junior
Career goal: Cardiologist or architect



Horne

"The reason I am in JROTC is because I want to make a difference in my life by having respect for other people. Also, as a cadet, I can learn more about the military before I join. Next, I think it teaches cadets how to fight as a team."

"I plan a career in the military. The reason why is because the military has good benefits. The military helps people get homes for their families. Also, the military gets cadets' bodies physically in shape. Next, it teaches cadets self-discipline and self-control. Most importantly, the military likes to defend its country."

Dexter Price, junior
Career goal: Active-duty military

"When I put on my uniform, I am showing patriotism. I love where I am from, and glad that I live in a country where I have rights. I have rights as a human being, regardless of race, age, sex, ethnic background, etc. Many people have died for the rights and I am very grateful."

"While in uniform, not only am I representing where I am from, but I am also showing support to fighters in the U.S. Army. I also send care packages to loved ones overseas."

Stephany Taylor, junior
Career goal: Meteorologist



Taylor

"We learn a lot about the military and government that we should know — like who is the secretary of state. We learn about different wars, how to use a map and compass, and other things that are going on in the world today. We also learn about teamwork, leadership and integrity."

Brandon Hughes, junior
Career goal: Active-duty military



Hughes

"Before I became apart of JROTC, I would look at those already in JROTC with great admiration. As they wore their Army green uniforms, cadets were quite obvious ... The uniforms were so eye-catching with the ribbons, rank and shiny, black shoes. I would do whatever it took for me to have one of my very own."

"When I finally joined JROTC, I soon learned that it required a lot more hard work and dignity than I thought. I failed to realize that the uniform we were supposedly showing off is the same exact uniform soldiers are losing their lives for on a daily basis."

Deshunnica McClelland, junior
Career goal: Pediatrician



McClelland



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS

Gabrielle Lewis, a junior at Meridian High School and a member of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps on campus, reviews the day's activities with Lt. Col. Truitt Breazeale, senior Army instructor for the school's JROTC program.

Interview with
Lt. Col. Truitt Breazeale

Gabrielle Lewis is a junior at Meridian High School. She has been a member of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps for three years, attaining the on-campus rank of sergeant. Gabrielle would like to pursue a career as a pediatric nurse.

She interviewed retired Lt. Col. Truitt Breazeale for this "Profile 2005: A Letter from Home" project.

"I chose this subject because I like to hear other people's opinions," Gabrielle said.

"Lt. Col. Breazeale is very supportive of our country. I believe that he would do anything for this country because he is not ashamed of his country — but very proud of it."

By Gabrielle Lewis
special to The Star

Lt. Col. Truitt Breazeale is a retired veteran. He served in the U.S. Army for 30 years. He is currently the senior Army instructor for Meridian High School's Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program. He has been at Meridian High for 14 years. I asked him a some questions about his military experience and the deployment of troops to Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and other duty stations in the Middle East.

Lewis: Have you ever been in a war? Did it affect your life?

Breazeale: Yes, I have been in Vietnam, where I served for two years. It did affect my life but not in a negative way. It gave me a greater appreciation for this great country we live in. The war made me a better person. I found out that much of what we take for granted is precious and should not be taken for granted. It taught me to be proud of what we have and try to help those who are not as fortunate.

Lewis: What's your opinion of the U.S. War on Terror?

Breazeale: The war we are in now is no different from any other war we have been involved in. Civilians

Many countries of the world smite us for what we stand for, and they will take drastic measures to hurt us. No longer will we stand by and not take action against those who threaten our way of life.

Lt. Col. Truitt Breazeale

and service personnel will be killed. I do know that freedom is not free; there is a price that must be paid. For some of us, we have to pay the ultimate price to achieve that freedom.

Many say that this war was not necessary, but I am a solid supporter of our president and I feel his decisions have been correct. We have eliminated a cruel leader who, if left in power, we would have attacked again. We will win, but only at a great sacrifice — a sacrifice I feel is worth the end result.

Lewis: Why was the war necessary?

Breazeale: We were attacked, and we tried diplomacy, but it did not work. Many will say Iraq had nothing to do with our being attacked, but that is wrong. Look at what is happening there now. Iraq was a base for operations against us. If we get rid of the base, or the root, then the insurgents, the vine, will die.

Lewis: Do you believe this country is destined for another war?

Breazeale: Yes, I believe this because we are the most powerful nation in the world and we represent freedom. We will not impose our will on others, but when a country seeks our help in overcoming a dictatorship, we will probably help.

Many countries of the world smite us for what we stand for, and they will take drastic measures to hurt us. No longer will we stand by and not take action against those who threaten our way of life.

Lewis: Would you ever go back to war again?

Breazeale: Yes, I would go back to war to protect and preserve the freedom we presently enjoy. Every American should feel this way and be willing to do their share. Some people that speak ill of us should be sent to those countries that do not have the freedom we enjoy.

Thank you, dear soldier

Erica du Plessis is a senior at Meridian High School. Her parents are Francois and Pauline de Plessis. Erica is president of the Dusty Social Service Club and she is co-editor of the MHS Wildcat newspaper. She plans to major in pre-med at the University of Mississippi.



du Plessis

I just wanted to say thank you.

Thank you for lending your helping hand, in order to protect our beautiful land.

Thank you for the giving of your time and the willingness to put your life on the line.

Thank you for sacrificing all that you've known just so we as a country can be safe here at home.

Thank you for the opportunities you've provided for the land of the free, and letting others experience how great that feeling can be.

Thank you for making the world a better place than it was yesterday, and showing us all that if there is a will there is a way.

Thank you for defining what is courage, bravery and pride. I would be honored to shake your hand one day and stand at your side.

Thank you for simply everything you have done, because in our hearts here at home you already have won.

Thank you.

— Erica du Plessis